

A History of
Messiah's
Evangelical Lutheran Church



1868-1943

SOUTH WILLIAMSPORT
PENNSYLVANIA



"The Church With a Past — The Church With a Future"

A HISTORY
of
Messiah's Evangelical
Lutheran
Church

SOUTH WILLIAMSPORT, PENNA.

By

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1943

Dedicated

TO OUR PASTOR

THE REV. E. RAYMOND SHAHEEN

WHOSE

UNFAILING INSPIRATION AND

ENCOURAGEMENT HAVE MADE

THIS HISTORY POSSIBLE

*"Jumping o'er times,
Turning the accomplishments of many years
Into an hour-glass."*

KING HENRY V

Foreword

WITH what misgivings we approached the task and the privilege of writing the history of Messiah's Lutheran Church, no one but those to whom the progress of the church has been a living reality will ever know. Many of our congregation felt that a history would be unprofitable, that it would accomplish no particular purpose, and that the gleanings from the past would prove too meager for the continuity necessary to a history. We could not believe that a church which had survived its birth pangs and struggled to a glorious maturity of seventy-five years had nothing to say for itself. No history can be written solely in terms of specific events; rather must it be evolved from the Christlike vision and spirit of the people who have made these events possible. We have lacked neither of these divine qualities either in the pastors or in the congregations of our church. To say that we have had no history is to say that we have failed to grow. We know that such a supposition has been far from true, and if we needed any justification for the writing of a history of our church, we should have found it in the faith of the ten sturdy men and women who founded our church and handed down the torch of service to our present congregation.

We are deeply grateful to all of those members of our congregation who have supplied us, from a fund of precious memories, with information about the evolution of Messiah's Lutheran Church. Because of the sparse and fragmentary character of our church records, this information has been invaluable. These threads of remembered knowledge have been woven into a pattern of progress and regression that will keep us ever aware of the human pulse that beats close to the surface of any church of a living God. With equal gratitude we acknowledge our spiritual debt to our pastor, E. Raymond Shsheen, whose abiding faith in the possibility of a written history of our church has been a constant inspiration. May our united prayers go forth to the glorious work ahead, to a history still to be written by a proud people of a proud church.

H. B. W.

A Church Is Born

*"There's a divinity that shapes our ends,
Rough hew them how we will."*

HAMLET

* * * * *

*"In those holy fields,
Over whose acres walk'd the blessed feet,
Which, fourteen hundred years ago, were nail'd
For our advantage on the bitter cross."*

KING HENRY IV

A Church Is Born

THE CIVIL WAR had come to a close two years before. Stilled were the distant drums, silent the clarion call of martial music, and quiet the dusty roads that had known the tread of weary feet turning homeward from the battle. Men who had fought and despaired, women who had waited and prayed, now turned to the difficult task of reconstruction and the establishment of a normal living in a country still filled with turbulence and unrest. As never before did the people of faith look to their God for the consummation of that unity which had been purchased with bloodshed and a grief too deep for tears. In the Susquehanna valley, life stirred to new vigor with the first clatter of car wheels, the surge of logs that heralded the spring floods, and the drone of sawmills bearing witness to the growing lumber trade. For some years previous to the war, the restless, irrepressible Peter Herdic had been fast at work building houses and mills along the north bank of the river and granting building sites to churches still in their infancy, and men now home from battle in search of a fresh start in life were attracted by the increasing business opportunities in Williamsport. Many settlers from neighboring valleys drifted to the banks of the river to become an integral part of the community and to leave their impress upon the teeming life of the thriving lumber town. A goodly number of the newcomers were of German stock who brought with them the undying faith of the sainted Luther, and who found for themselves a church home at St. Mark's, close to the central market place and to the heart of the pulsing community.

But even as the country had been rent by cleavage a few years before, so was history repeating itself in the growth of Lutheranism in the lumber town north of the river. In the Mother church on Market Street, the germ of dissension had been developing among its members, with brother pitted against brother, neighbor against neighbor, and friend against friend, but always more in the spirit of sorrow than of anger. The more conservative members of the church, quietly schooled in orthodox ritual and liturgy, viewed with heartfelt distress the sympathy of other members of the church with an informality of service contrary to the accustomed practices of St. Mark's. Good people, tried and true, on either side of the controversy, suffered grief and humiliation from this division of spirit. They saw only disaster for the church in its future development, but strangely enough the cleavage proved to be a healthy one that gave birth to a forward movement of Lutheranism in the community. Six short years after the war, a group of young men just entering business and professional life, with little money in their purses but vigorously endowed with energy and talents, left the Mother church to establish another Lutheran church in the community, St. Paul's. This new organization fulfilled a deep-seated need in a town where every new

smokestack that nosed its way skyward brought an influx of settlers. The Lutheran churches of Williamsport were meeting the demands of a reconstruction era, for differ though they would in matters of ritual, they were still united by one faith and by one God, and they were not content to lie in inglorious ease, unresponsive to the needs of their community for a living God.

Out of much the same staunch divergence of spirit was born Messiah's Lutheran Church on the south banks of the river, unheralded and unsung, for search as we may in the yellowed, brittle pages of the early newspapers for some record of its birth, we find only an oppressive volume of silence. Out of such families as the Weisses, the Lutchers, the Weigels, the Rickarts, the Jarretts, the Aults, and the Turks, who at one time were the representative families of St. Mark's, our church received its early impetus. Many of these families were early settlers in the plateau on the south bank of the river, known among early explorers as "Lower Bottom" to distinguish it from "Upper Bottom" across from Linden. Even as they hewed rocks from their cellars the size of mountain boulders, and grimly moulded for themselves a village appropriately called Rocktown, we like to believe that the same pioneer steadfastness that fashioned a community out of stone, founded a church out of the same unyielding faith.

A harvest of hungry souls stood ready and in need of the ministrations of a church. Before the completion of the canal, the descending trade on the river had become increasingly heavy, and watermen frequently required a place of rest and refreshment for the night or for the week-end. The foot of Hagerman's run soon became a favorite place to tie up, and though the early tavern on this site adequately supplied the needs of the body, it could not satisfy the needs of the spirit with the break of each Sabbath day. Like Amos of old, these watermen entertained a healthy respect for the elements and for the God who created them, and it is significant to note that the first formal meetings of Messiah's Church were held in the old schoolhouse on Main street, close to the tavern, where lumbermen might enter the simple meeting house in their rough boots and jackets for an interlude of prayer.

But the harvest lay ripe in still other ways, for the village of Rocktown concerned itself not alone with the lumber trade that surged the length and breadth of the river. The same Jacob Weiss who was to become a founder of Messiah's Lutheran Church had bought a tract of forty acres of land, laid it out in town lots, established a brickyard, and effectively promoted trade in the community. The Keystone Furniture company also had its inception several years after the war when George Luppert established the West Branch Susquehanna Furniture company on the south side of the river. At his solicitation, many German families, all of them coming from Neuburg on the Rhine, settled in the community, "sick for home amid the alien corn." The object of much good-natured ridicule among their neighbors, these new citizens built their modest homes on the side of the hill, lovingly plied their strong, sensitive fingers in cabinet-making during the week, and gathered on Saturdays to sing and to dance to the plaintive melodies of the Rhineland. When Sundays came, they remembered in

their hearts the dauntless spirit who had nailed his theses to the Schlosskirche in Wittenberg, proclaiming for simple people like themselves a new freedom in religious thought, and they thirsted for the satisfaction to be found only in the community of worship found among kindred peoples. A line located near the present site of Bayard street divided this new community of "Bootstown" from Rocktown proper, and during the week the small boys of Rocktown were wont to dare the young strangers to cross the line, even as the strange lads in turn doubledared their tormenters to step foot across this all-important division! But the time was close at hand when all of them, and their descendants after them, were to share in a communion of worship and harmony in a church common to all.

In a virgin community like this, teeming with river life and populated by people from far vineyards, Messiah's Lutheran Church had its birth and put down its roots. Even before that little company of young spirits left the Mother church in Williamsport to establish St. Paul's, certain residents of Rocktown who weekly crossed the river bridge to attend the services at St. Mark's, were experiencing unrest and dissatisfaction. In all honesty of spirit, they firmly believed that the order of service used at St. Mark's was ill-adapted to a people whose livelihood was wrested from stone and water, and whose rigors of living had reduced their attitudes of worship to the essence of simplicity. Not only that, but inclement weather during the long winter months made the journey across the river bridge a hardship that seems inconceivable to us of the motor car era. Rising before dawn on a winter Sunday, housewives heated bricks for the sleigh, warmed caps and mittens in the oven, and with their families started across the bridge with the horse and cutter. They arrived at the church with frost-bitten fingers, chilled to the bone from sleet and wind, only to shiver through the service with one ear attuned to the sermon and the other to the champing of the half-frozen horses standing before the church door. Warmed neither in body nor spirit, a small group of people from the south bank of the river regretfully gave farewell to St. Mark's and with a commendable spirit of enterprise met for worship in their own struggling community. At first, they gathered in the homes of one another for simple services, but the results were scarcely satisfying to a pioneer group like this. Too often had they seen small mission bands scatter and die for lack of a shepherd to lead them and a pastor to guide them. All too well did they realize the futility of adding members to their fold, for strangers who did not hesitate to cross the threshold of a church in search of spiritual strength and comfort, were reluctant to invade the privacy of a home.

In the summer of 1867, the Reverend J. G. Griffith had received a call from the Susquehanna Conference of the East Pennsylvania Synod to do mission work in Williamsport and its vicinity, and the struggling little band on the south bank of the river, little larger and with no greater pretensions than a cottage prayer group, recognized in him the answer to their earnest prayers. Late in the summer of 1867, Pastor Griffith, looking not unlike a patriarch of old with his high, broad forehead, his long beard, and his gentle eyes, preached his first

sermon on the South Side. No more than fifteen or twenty souls had gathered in the old brick schoolhouse for this first service, but the people were grateful for even so humble a beginning, and Pastor Griffith consented to preach for them on each Lord's day. For five months the little group met in the poorly heated schoolhouse, ever encouraged to notice each stranger to find his way to this strange sanctuary, hut filled with a longing to have a church worthy of God Himself. Knife-scarred desks were poor substitutes for an altar, and a dusty table scarcely satisfied the natural yearning for a pulpit, and so it was that on the twelfth day of January, 1868, five stalwart men and their wives organized a church and selected Pastor Griffith as the shepherd of their fold. The founders of the Rocktown church were Jacob Weiss and his wife Rosanna; H. D. Keiser and his wife Sarah; Jackson McFadden and his wife Elizabeth; Boyd Longen and his wife Mary; and John Reinhart and his wife Christiana. Altho these men and women have long since passed from memory, we remember with gratitude and pride that Jacob Weiss, one of the founders of our church, has often been referred to as the father of the English Lutheran Church in Williamsport and in South Williamsport. Even as God said of Abraham "I know him that he will command his children after him," so did the influence of Jacob Weiss transmit itself to his descendants, who continued to bring liberal hearts to the service of their church in the years to come.



*Last Easter Service in the Old Church on Church St.
The Rev. W. Gardner Thrall in Pulpit*

Infancy of a Church

*"Sweet are the uses of adversity,
Which, like the toad, ugly and venomous,
Wears yet a precious jewel in his head."*

AS YOU LIKE IT

*"The attempt, and not the deed,
Confounds us."*

MACBETH

Infancy of a Church

ALTHOUGH this tiny but gallant group of men and women had now definitely severed the last tie with the Mother church in Williamsport, it was not unaware of the immortal words of our great confession: "And for the true unity of the church, it is sufficient to agree concerning the doctrines of the gospel, and the administration of the sacraments. Nor is it necessary that the same traditions, that is, rites and ceremonies instituted by men, should be everywhere observed. As Paul says: 'One faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all.'" All bitterness of spirit had been left behind, and perhaps in these first difficult days of establishing a congregation, of meeting with rebuffs from apathetic and disinterested strangers who scoffed at their feeble progress, this handful of people occasionally felt a strange nostalgia for the established sanctuary across the river which they could no longer call their own. Be that as it may, they girded their loins and determined to build a house of worship for themselves. It was no small enterprise for the little congregation to plan the erection of a church; their numbers were few and their finances extremely limited, and the struggling population of Rocktown gave little encouragement to the project. Even some among their own numbers looked doubtfully upon the plan as too great an undertaking to be carried through to success. They questioned the expediency of the movement and refused to lend either their sympathy or their aid to the building plans. These must have been sad days for Pastor Griffith who had to witness the conflict not only in the Rocktown parish but in his charge at Montoursville, where similar plans for building were afoot. He constantly pointed out to his people that the way of progress lay in the early establishment of a Lutheran church on the south shores of the river, and it must have warmed his heart when the more determined members of his flock decided, in the spring of 1868, to build a church.

It was a strange beginning indeed. No building fund lay conveniently at hand, gleaned from leisurely months of saving and preparation, and many of the small flock refused to put their money into what appeared to be nothing more substantial than a mirage. The Building Committee, composed of Pastor Griffith, Jacob Weiss, John Rickart, and Henry J. Lutcher, found it necessary to advance the money from their own personal resources. Mr. Lutcher headed the subscription list with a gift of one hundred dollars, and the first payment on the church was made possible by loans from the committee members, without interest, in order that the construction might start at once. The Committee purchased a lot on Church street for six hundred dollars, and the building got under way. It seemed an advantageous choice at the time, and the Committee immediately drew up plans for a simple one story building with a tower rising above

the entrance hall. Later these plans were revised and expanded to include a basement room to be used for the sessions of the Sunday School. Building operations started, and one can well imagine the thrill of joy that swept through the hearts of the gallant little band of people who had taken their courage in their hands to make their dream a living reality. In all humility of spirit, Pastor Griffith said, "Much of the success of the church was due to the earnest, God loving women who worked with their pastor." Although the main audience room of the church was not completed during Pastor Griffith's ministry, the lecture room was finished and dedicated on Sunday, February 7, 1869. A neighboring pastor from the village of Selinsgrove delivered the dedicatory sermon, even as grateful hearts bowed before their God in tender acknowledgement of this, their home, at last.

Pastor Griffith stayed with the people of Messiah's until March, 1873, and then resigned his pastorate, leaving a congregation of forty-six sturdy souls. A month later Pastor J. P. Neff received a joint call from the Rocktown and Montoursville congregations, bringing to his pastorate the same terse efficiency that he brought to his medical practice. During the first winter of his labors in Rocktown, Pastor Neff enjoyed none of the privacy of living accorded to present-day pastors. He went from pillar to post, living with whichever of his congregation would welcome him, and preaching twice every Sunday, alternating the morning and evening services between his two pulpits. The next year he lived in Montoursville under the same precarious conditions, but continued to alternate the service between his two charges, and even found time during the long winter months to hold a series of revival services. He left no stone unturned to persuade people to the kingdom of God, and during his ministry, his influence made itself felt in the lives of young people who were prepared by him to devote their unselfish services to the work of the church. W. D. Crooks and G. W. MacIntosh were only two of many who first met their Christ under the tutelage of Pastor Neff.

After the completion of the lecture room in the church, the congregation had settled down for a breathing spell, well satisfied with its labors, but Pastor Neff entertained no intention of allowing his people, either in Rocktown or in Montoursville, to bask in sleek contentment while work still lay at hand. His unflagging efforts had doubled the church membership and he now urged the completion of the churches for which he was responsible. Three years after Pastor Neff was called to Messiah's, he saw the completion of the main audience room, and even as he had been working toward this end, the women of the church had been soliciting money in the neighborhood and in the city to supply the church with carpets, tables, and other necessary furnishings. There were rebuffs in plenty, especially from some of the members of the Mother church, who looked with derision upon this campaign and refused to reach out a helping hand to this infant daughter church. But the necessary amount was raised, and on May 7, 1876, the dedicatory services were held for the new audience room. Thrilled and stimulated by this tangible evidence of their efforts, the congregation subscribed for all of the remaining incumbrance at that memorable service.

In the middle of March, 1880, a new minister, Pastor A. N. Warner, was called to the church in Rocktown, and one may well imagine his dismay and his financial distress when he learned that he was to care for not only the church in South Williamsport, but for the Lutheran church in Montoursville, Union School House and St. John's Mission—all for the modest sum of five hundred dollars! As Pastor Warner put it, "The compensation pledged me for my labor by these four congregations was \$500; and out of this amount I was to pay my rent. And some were in considerable doubt as to whether the \$500 could be raised by their combined efforts." It wasn't a cheering prospect, but Pastor Warner managed to preach for the Montoursville congregation every week, and for the other congregations every two weeks. This arrangement was scarcely satisfying to the people of Messiah's. Pastorless every other Sunday and through much of the week, discouraged by the slow growth of membership in the church, and financially burdened by the debt, the church council proposed that the church be disbanded and that the people unite with churches across the river. Again was a pastor of Messiah's to stand firm against the apathy and timidity of his people. Even as the mighty Joshua time and again withstood the desire of the Israelites to give up the Promised Land and return to the bondage of Egypt, so did Pastor Warner offer his earnest appeals to his people to hold fast to this church which had been so dearly purchased. He pointed out that the rolling mill, long idle, had changed ownership and was preparing to resume operations; that the foundations of a nail factory had been laid and offered possibilities for increased business; and that greater numbers of people were buying building sites in South Williamsport and casting their fortunes on the south banks of the river. Thus exhorted by their pastor, the congregation held steady, and in 1882, the situation was relieved by the separation of the Montoursville charge from the South Williamsport parish. It was quite clear that Messiah's needed at least one service each Sabbath and more pastoral care, and now that Pastor Warner had severed his connection with the Montoursville charge, he was able to devote all of his time to St. John's Mission and to the work of Messiah's church. With a considerable degree of pride, the infant church at Rocktown raised its pastor's salary, added a handful of new members to its rolls, and paid off nearly half of its indebtedness. The great moment of cowardly indecision had been weathered and passed, the church stood firmly upon its own two feet, and new life coursed through its veins to its greater spiritual growth.

Growing Pains

*"Our doubts are traitors,
And make us lose the good we oft might win,
By fearing to attempt."*

MEASURE FOR MEASURE

"Suit the action to the word; the word to the action."

HAMLET

"There are no tricks in plain and simple faith."

JULIUS CAESAR

Growing Pains

THE LONG, arduous months of dividing his pastoral care between the Montoursville and the South Williamsport parishes had taken their toll of Pastor Warner in failing health. His physical strength could no longer compete with the demands of his unflagging spirit, and in the summer of 1883 he regretfully took leave of the congregation which he had loved and nurtured. To his deep and growing concern, the church drifted through the summer months without the stimulus of a spiritual leader, and upon his recommendation the Reverend J. M. Steck was elected to the pastorate of Messiah's Lutheran Church. With temerity of heart and depression of spirit, Pastor Steck took over his new responsibilities among a people discouraged by the loss of their pastor, and indifferent from months of inactivity. He came to his charge without even a preliminary trial sermon and after but one brief visit to the church in Rocktown—a visit replete with disappointments. In a tenderly human confession, written some years later, Pastor Steck tells us that he found it appalling to leave larger and more flourishing congregations for a struggling church of forty lone souls who were fast losing their initiative and their desire to expand and to progress. But like a true soldier of the cross, the new minister remembered with humility the travails of St. Paul who found work to be done wherever his tired feet should lead him, and who did not ask of God a ready-made church in answer to his petitions. Only forty strong the congregation might be, but the members were devoted in spirit, and they had accepted their new pastor on simple trust alone. That was enough for him. Out of a contrite heart, born of his first unworthy but deeply human disappointment, he realized that he might be equally disappointing to his small flock, and he determined to live up to their trust in him.

In Pastor Steck the congregation found a happy combination of spiritual tone and executive ability. One reads with a peculiar gentleness his reminiscences of his boyhood church and the sacred memories that lingered in his mind and heart through the years to follow. We close our eyes and watch the train of carriages winding down the dusty roads from Muncy and Hughesville to the "Old Jerusalem Church," the Mother Church of Lutheranism in the county, hewn out of the wilderness by worthy followers of the immortal hero of Worms. It is Communion day, and worshipers have come long miles in the sultry glare of the sun "to break the bread of life" and to remember their God in this holy place. The service has not started, and a small boy, one day destined to guide the spiritual life of Messiah's Lutheran Church, stands in the churchyard watching the scene before him. The men are hitching the horses in the little grove nearby; the women are placing flowers on the graves of loved ones in the cemetery near at hand; and the boys and girls have clustered on the steps of the adjacent parochial

schoolhouse with its log walls and its clapboard roof. The soft strains of a hymn drift through the open windows bidding the worshipers to enter, and the small boy quickly finds his place in one of the three spacious galleries, while his elders more sedately seek their pews on the floor below. It is the moment of meditation and prayer, but presently the boy rises and experiences a thrill of joy as his beloved pastor enters the sanctuary to approach the sacred altar. The congregation sings a hymn full of meaning to his youthful heart, "Alas! and did my Saviour bleed," and he isn't even aware of the discordant notes that rise and fall, as the feeble voices of the old join with the lusty voices of the young in this eternal song of praise. It is time for the lad to go to the altar, and as his pastor says, "Take, eat, this is my body, this is my blood of the new testament which is shed for many for the remission of sins," the boy receives the precious assurance of forgiveness through the blessed sacrament administered in Christ's name. He goes home strangely impressed, to know in the fullness of time that the sorrowing were comforted that hour, the weak strengthened, and the indifferent quickened. Out of a spiritual background like this, rooted in more than a century of steadfast, pioneer faith, Pastor Steck came to minister to the needs of our church.

It wasn't an easy plough to which he set his shoulders. Though warmed by the new friendships formed in the church and stimulated by the stress of work to be done, Pastor Steck soon realized that if ever this, his church, were to establish a self-sustaining congregation and occupy a significant place in the community, a new church building must be planned for and erected. With acute dismay he saw new streets opening along paths divergent from the church, and a rapidly growing population seizing upon town lots to build homes in a direction that was fast leaving the church in an unenviable isolation. Each Sunday witnessed an increasing attendance at Sunday School and church, with inadequate space to provide for this precious in-gathering. Far from pleasant was this discovery to the new pastor who had just experienced the worry and work of building in his former charge. Moreover, how could he suggest a new church building to a congregation that had just paid off its last four hundred dollars of indebtedness after fifteen years of struggle and concern? It seemed a tremendous burden to lay upon his people, who were taking a long-deserved breathing spell, and who did not recognize the resemblance between their church and the small boy who has outgrown his first pair of shoes. But Pastor Steck could not ignore his responsibility to the Board that had given these people into his keeping, nor could he ignore the crying need to advance the interests of the church in the borough. After consulting Pastor Warner, who still held the interests of the church close to his heart, the new pastor secured an option on the lot at the corner of Howard street and Southern avenue for a brief two weeks. We can readily imagine with what trepidation he faced the church council to confess this action which had been taken upon his own responsibility, and to plead with the members for its immediate purchase. With equal clarity we can imagine his heartbreak when the council could not see its way clear to take any action, and refused to make the purchase. A weaker spirit might have accepted this decision with a spiritual shrug of the shoulders and have turned to lesser business with

resignation, but Pastor Steck was made of sterner stuff. In his charming booklet "A Backward Look," written some years later, he tells us that "the lot was secured and held by someone until the church would need it." We think that Pastor Steck must have blushed just a little when he wrote those off-hand and nonchalant words, for it was he himself who purchased the present church lot, to be held in trust for the people until that time when they should awake to their growing needs. One can not be grateful enough for the vision of a man like Pastor Steck, who could not let his flock lose this opportunity "to grow in wisdom and stature," but who could patiently bide his time during the "growing pains" of his beloved people.

Pastor Steck started his ministry of Messiah's Lutheran Church in September of 1883, and despite the unfortunate location of the church and its general inadequacy to meet the demands of a growing community, the pastor left no stone unturned to draw the unchurched into the sanctuary of his new charge. Personal visitations, catechetical classes, and special revival services gave a rich flavor to the long winter months and to the spring of that year. The evening services were frequently crowded to the full capacity of the church, though many stayed away because of a groundless rumor that the church was unsafe. Unfounded though the rumor might be, it served its purpose, for every creaking of the well-worn boards reminded the congregation that an overloaded raft must eventually sink, and that the erection of a new church could not be delayed indefinitely. The revival services found young and old alike gathered in the church, warmed by neighborly fellowship and the quickened interest in the things of the spirit. Occasionally the prayers and the sermons seemed interminably long to the "young fry" of the congregation, and one member of the church tells us that the boys and girls often brought apples and sandwiches to munch during the prayer hour. On one occasion when their restive spirits could no longer follow the zealous but lengthy discourse from the pulpit and they had surreptitiously crouched behind the gallery rail for a bit of the forbidden apples, the hanging oil lamp crashed from the ceiling with a din equivalent to the crack of doom, and for one terrified moment the frightened youngsters thought that surely their sins had found them out!

By the close of the year the membership had doubled itself, and as many as one hundred and fifty men, women, and children were listed on the rolls of the Sunday School. During this period of expansion in the church, the Sunday School board met with the age-old problems of proper instruction in the church school. It was not enough for them to invite friends and neighbors to become one with them for this hour on the Sabbath; they wanted to provide them with a responsible staff, alive to the very real possibilities of inspired teaching. The old minutes of the Sunday School board are colorfully replete with the pertinent questions that buzzed through the minds of the board members like so many annoying insects. Why wasn't the attendance at Sunday School larger? Why weren't the teachers better prepared? Could "good intentions" compensate for poor preparation? They could not brush aside these considerations as housewives



FORMER PASTORS

Pastors Griffith, Neff, Warner, Steck, and Bannen
(Pastor Thrall Not Present)

do a fly, and in the minutes of March 15, 1885, we find this terse comment by the secretary: "Remarks by Superintendent Hall for the benefit of the school that it would be a benefit if the teachers would meet one night each week for the purpose of studying the lesson!" Evidently the board members agreed with Pope that, so far as the Bible School teachers were concerned, "A little knowledge is a dangerous thing. Drink deep, or touch not the Hypernian well!" Apparently the suggested meetings for preparing the Sunday School lesson were put into effect, for eight months later, we find a board member grimly voicing the additional suggestion that the teachers read over the lesson before attending the meetings! But we think with tenderness of these faithful men and women who met each week at their pastor's home to arrive at a common understanding of the lesson to be taught the following Sunday, and we rejoice that their united effort brought ever-increasing attendance at the church school. With what satisfaction must the board have issued its call for more teachers to care for the growing membership.

In the winter of 1885, the Sunday School matured in still another direction, one commonplace enough to us at the present time, but new and thrilling to a people who were just beginning to test their wings. Up to this time, all of the special programs of the church had been staged and presented by members of other churches, more experienced in church-craft and the art of spiritual expression; but in November of the year 1885, the Sunday School board, in a burst of newly-acquired confidence, moved that the church use its own resources and talents to present the Christmas program. Unremarkable as this may seem, it indicated a new-born consciousness of the latent powers within the church body itself. No longer would church membership limit itself to passive attendance of the services; rather would it imply the contribution of abilities to the service of the group, and the development of human personality in terms of Christian giving. The whole glorious field of pageantry and song had been opened to a people who had hungered for co-operative and expressive service like this. The seed had been sown for that far-distant day when the church would employ a full-time minister of music to train children and adults alike in a richer and deeper appreciation of worship through song.

By this time, the Sunday School had grown so large that it required both rooms of the church, and when special services were presented, the church found itself in the embarrassing position of having to borrow chairs from the Methodist church and of having to ask Company D for the use of the armory. This dependence hurt the pride of the more sensitive spirits of the church, who now recognized with their pastor the need for a new church building. The first words of encouragement came from a stalwart member of the congregation, Mr. Daniel Weigel. Meeting the pastor on the street one day, Mr. Weigel said, "I hear that you feel the need of a new church?" With a small sigh, Pastor Steck admitted his dream of long months. "Well," said Mr. Weigel, "when you are ready to huild, I will furnish all the red-oak lumber for the inside finish of the church." This seemed almost too good to be true, so with complete honesty

the pastor ruefully pointed out to Mr. Weigel that the inside finish, the pews, and the ceilings might require a greater amount of oak than he would wish to contribute. "That's all right," was the quiet answer. This generous offer fell like refreshing drops of rain upon the heart of the pastor, and became doubly dear to him as a harbinger of the shower of gifts to come.

One of the first gifts to the new church project came from D. M. Contner of Belleville, who, though not a member of the congregation, shared with the pastor his dream of a "more stately mansion." Pastor Steck had received Mr. Contner into church membership when he was an elderly man of sixty-five, and upon receiving the check, the pastor remembered the words in which he had made his application for membership: "I would like to be received into the church, if you think I am worthy, but if you admit me remember that you are admitting a poor old sinner." In the few years that were left to him of life, Mr. Contner proved that he clearly understood the meaning of the words "to be saved by grace," for though not a wealthy man as riches were reckoned at that time, he had a generous heart that never failed to respond to the needs of his God. On this occasion, his timely gift started the ball rolling and gave practical impetus to the initial desire for a new church. The women of the church immediately organized an Aid Society, composed not only of church members but of other interested women in the community, and designed to find ways and means to raise the necessary building funds. It mattered not to their staunch spirits that the church council had taken no official action to sanction the proposed project. Like minute men of old, they were preparing and paving the way for what they considered an inevitable change and expansion.

Early in the year 1886, the church council called for a congregational meeting in February to decide upon the building project and the program for expansion, but Pastor Steck had no intention of allowing his people to attend the meeting with any degree of indecision or opposition in their minds. The project lay too close to his heart not to strike quickly and strike hard. On the Sunday preceding the meeting, Pastor Steck rose in the pulpit to announce the following meaningful and significant text from Isaiah: "The children, which thou shalt have, after thou hast lost the others, shall say in thy ears, the place is too straight for me, give place to me that I may dwell." It took a particular brand of courage to face this congregation, many of whose members opposed the new church building with the timeless cry of "it can't be done," but the pastor girded his loins with the sound conviction of his own invincible faith, and shot these straight-forward words at an attentive congregation: "There comes a time in the history of congregations, when to furnish larger church accommodations becomes a Christian duty; a duty which they owe to God, and to those who preceded them in laboring for the enlargement of the church. As members of the church you owe it to those who labored in the church before you, some of whom have gone to their reward, your fathers and mothers and other loved ones, that you do what you can to enlarge and perpetuate their labors, by meeting the present opportunities for wider usefulness than they pos-

sessed, and yet for which they prepared the way. As members of the community we owe it to ourselves to provide for the spiritual wants of the place in which we live. The cry is heard in this congregation, and community as to church room, 'This place is too straight for me, give me place that I may dwell.' Such a call brings with it a weight of responsibility. It remains to be seen whether this church has the heart to meet the opportunity which God is now giving her, whether she is willing to take an advanced step, which will in the end bring enlarged benefits, or whether they shall demonstrate that they had not the spirit to enter the open door to a broader usefulness. In the history of this congregation, there are yet things to be written, which will bring honor or dishonor upon her present membership, disclosing whether we are worthy or unworthy of such a time as this." Some years later, when the church had become a reality, Pastor Steck was to remark fervently, "Thank God they have been written in her honor."

This had been plain, earthy speech on the part of Pastor Steck, but he had not shot his last bolt by any means. On the following Sunday, on the morning appointed for the congregational vote, Pastor Steck again prepared a sermon pertinent to the occasion and based upon the text "Wherefore criest thou unto me, speak unto the children of Israel that they go forward." The week had been filled with its usual quota of discouragements. Some of the congregation murmured that the church which was good enough for their fathers should be good enough for them. Others objected to the proposed indebtedness, but again, Pastor Steck fearlessly faced his people and appealed to them with these words: "We have been thinking and praying about the matter which is to be brought before us for consideration, of building a new church edifice. Is it our duty to pray and nothing more? Is there not a call to go forward? I know that to build such a church edifice as we ought to erect, if we build one at all, is a great undertaking. It will require great sacrifice on our part, there will be great difficulties in the way of its accomplishment, as I have ascertained by experience in building. It would be easier for you and me, if we were willing to rest satisfied with our present church home; we might save money and care by such a course. But before we so decide let us ask ourselves under the circumstances, what does duty to the church of Christ demand? What does duty to the dead as well as the living who labored for the enlargement of Christ's kingdom here demand? What does our present relation to the future interests of this church demand? Do not all emphasize the words of the text, 'Speak unto the children of Israel that they go forward?'"

At the close of the sermon, the congregation unanimously adopted resolutions declaring its purpose to "arise and build," and well may we believe that Pastor Steck's happiness and gratitude were complete in that soul-stirring moment. Within a month, the pastor had secured subscriptions amounting to four thousand dollars, and with justifiable pride the Aid Society pledged one thousand dollars, most of which already graced its treasury through the unstinting efforts of its members. W. D. Crooks, George W. Gilmore, George W. McIntosh, John H. McFadden and Daniel Steck were elected by the congregation as a Building Com-

mittee, and their first official action was the purchase of the two lots on the corner of Howard street and Southern avenue from Pastor Steck. It was an enthusiastic beginning, but once again Pastor Steck had to contain his soul in patience, for the bids on the work proved to be unsatisfactory to the committee and building plans were deferred until the following year.

It had been a strenuous winter, but when the golden days of summer came once more, the congregation found time to relax in the Christian fellowship of one another. With distinct envy we think of those long-ago picnics and we smile gently when we read, in the quaint words of the church school secretary, that a committee was appointed "to wait upon Captain Myers to see the very lowest he would take the picnic to Mountain Grove." To the children and adults alike it was a joyous adventure to board the old steamboat and watch the shore recede behind the splash of the paddlewheel, even as the band played gay tunes for the pleasure of the happy picnickers. When the holiday had come to a close, and the ham and lemonade committee had reported "all bills paid," the congregation knew with abiding satisfaction that another golden link had been forged in the chain of unity that bound their spiritual lives together.

In February of 1887 the Building Committee met once again to take up its interrupted task, and though Pastor John Steck had looked forward to this renewed energy after a long winter of marking time, his health was so far broken that he was scarcely able to attend to his normal pastoral duties. The work continued with what aid he could give it from his depleted physical reserve, and he saw the foundations of the new church laid, but it became necessary for him to resign his pastorate in the fall of 1887. One newspaper commentator spoke of Pastor Steck's ministry at Messiah's in these pungent but benedictial terms: "The labor of brother Steck in South Williamsport and St. John's Mission is like the box of ointment broken over the Master's head; coming generations will rise up and call him blessed. Tho the workman falls, the work will go on."

Transition

*"Sir, he made a chimney in my father's house,
And the bricks are alive at this day to testify it."*

KING HENRY IV

* * *

"There's nothing ill can dwell in such a temple."

TEMPEST

CHAPTER IV

Transition

Upon the resignation of Pastor Steck, the Reverend W. G. Thrall received a call to minister to the congregation of Messiah's Lutheran Church, and although a different personality from his predecessor, he lacked none of his Christlike zeal nor his vision to plan for a still greater heritage. On the Sabbath evening of January 8, 1888, Pastor Thrall was installed as the new minister, and at the special ceremonies for the occasion, Pastor J. A. Wirt, president of the synod, delivered a stern and practical charge to the people of Messiah's Lutheran Church, charging them to be ever mindful of their own spiritual responsibilities and of their loyalty to their church and to their pastor. A newspaper reporter, apparently quickened by this charge, delivered with all of the fire and conviction of the German Lutheran pastors of old, tersely wrote of it, "No one present could misunderstand a single sentence of his address!"

Scarcely had Pastor Thrall been installed before he became the editor and publisher of "Messiah's Missionary," the only printed publication on the South Side. Published monthly, the slender little pamphlet was designed not only to serve the interests of the congregation in the work of the church, but to adapt itself for general circulation in the community. With its quaint, stilted language, and its formalized departments variously termed "Golden Gleanings," "Our Youth" and "The Muse," Messiah's Missionary has become an almost priceless commentary upon the temper of our church in the closing years of the last century. Even the very practical business ads which appeared in each issue lend their piquancy and charm to the pamphlet, and we feel carried away to a lost and enchanted world as we pore over the appealing descriptions of India silk, cathedral glass, and "pleated bosom shirts" that found their way into this monthly bulletin. With stout-hearted courage, Pastor Thrall used the Missionary to make profound comments upon the international situation with one breath, and to chide the teachers of the Sunday School with the next! We chuckle softly when we read that "some of our young people are beginning to take an interest in the art of short-hand writing," we smile at Pastor Thrall's admonition to his people to go to the polls and "save the old Ship of State from total wreck in this present campaign," and we sympathize with his embarrassment when forced to appoint two ladies to collect his salary from the more delinquent members of the congregation; but over and beyond all else, we appreciate the spiritual urge that drove the new pastor of Messiah's to plan and publish a bulletin to stimulate the minds and souls of an entire community.

With the coming of spring in that first year of Pastor Thrall's ministry, the work on the new brick church was resumed, and on the twenty-fourth of June, 1888, the afternoon was set aside for the solemn rite of laying the corner

stone. It was a day eagerly anticipated by members of the church, and many were the disappointed hearts when a heavy deluge of rain turned the ground around the corner stone into a veritable swamp. Even the order of the program had to be altered because of the threatening clouds overhead, and according to Pastor Thrall "after the first address, the collection was lifted and the corner-stone laid, these being the two features in the exercise that were of the greater account." The unnamed speaker, scheduled to give the closing address, never did have a chance to stake his claim to glory at this particular rite, for scarcely had he started his address when a sweeping rain sent the audience flying for the shelter of their homes. Could we lift the bricks of our church today to peer into the cavity of the corner stone, we should find there copies of the city dailies containing accounts of the exercises; Luther's Smaller Catechism; several church periodicals; the original subscription list to the building fund; a brief history of Messiah's Lutheran Church; and the Lutheran Book of Worship. Surely a treasure trove lies at the foundation of our church, the tangible record of a people who followed the sacred charge to go forward to the more enduring glory of their God.

In the years that followed, the energies of young and old alike were united for the completion of the new church. The laying of the corner stone had been a definite challenge to the congregation to realize their dream of a new church home, and even as the building committee met in the pastor's study to argue the respective merits of cherry and oak and to attend to the all important contracts with architects and carpenters, the women of the church were making and selling "dust caps and sunbonnets" to swell the building fund. But the "best laid plans of mice and men" must often go astray, for in June of 1889, the flood waters of the Susquehanna burst upon the valley, inundating or destroying thousands of homes. Two New York papers carried the startling but erroneous report that Pastor Thrall had perished in the flood. Pastor Thrall was still very much alive, but deeply distressed by the tragedy that had come to his people and to his neighbors. As he drove through the countryside and saw the farm folk of his congregation silently hauling out their finest heads of cattle for burial in one continuous trench, he all but had farewell to the immediate completion of the church. The partially completed church had suffered its own loss, but the Lutheran Church at large sympathetically sent rehabilitation funds to Messiah's, and the men of the church earnestly and cheerfully gathered each evening to clear away the debris and to help with the cleaning. One likes to believe, with Pastor Thrall, that the completion of the church meant even more to these men because they willingly removed their coats and worked a miracle of survival.

A month later, on the twenty-eighth of July, the congregation of Messiah's Lutheran Church met for a memorable occasion, one compounded of both joy and sorrow. It was the farewell service in the old church on Church street, and on this beautiful sunlit day of more than fifty years ago, the people of Messiah's gathered around the old church altar to receive the Holy Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, poignantly mindful that this was the last time that they would offer

their vows to God in this place. Just twenty-two years before, the Reverend Griffith, the first pastor of the congregation, had preached his first sermon on the south banks of the river, and out of his ministry and labor had been fashioned this house of worship. It wasn't easy for the faithful of the parish to leave it, despite the new church that awaited them, and one can well imagine with what readiness of mind and glad consent they listened to both Pastor Steck and Pastor Thrall at the evening service when these two turned the clock back to talk of the years that had passed. Perhaps in that quiet hour of retrospection the congregation remembered the vows that had not been consummated, the hopes that had never been realized, the opportunities that had never been grasped, and as they lingered around the altar to touch it shyly and gently in farewell, one must need believe that they prayed silently for greater love and faith in the new and stimulating days to come.

A week later, small boys and girls, with wide smiles on their faces, hurried eagerly to the church in the morning, delighted with the prospect of "moving day." It was a significant day in Messiah's history when young and old alike, led by their pastor and the superintendents of the Sunday School, marched in a joyous but respectful procession from the old church to their new church home. One little, gray-haired woman, then a small child, smilingly tells us that she wistfully watched the procession go by, and when her mother wasn't looking, edged her way into the tail-end of the procession. She marched into the church with the others, and was so pleased with the kindness offered to her, a small stranger, that she found her way back to the church over and over again. With what pride must the people of Messiah's have looked upon the shining newness of their completed chapel, gallery, and infant room, and with what devotion must they have attacked the problem of reorganization in the church school.

Apparently the Sunday School board determined to raise the calibre of the Bible school sessions to a level worthy of their new home, for we find one of the members presenting the motion that any teacher absenting herself from Sunday School for two Sundays without an excuse be released from her duties and another appointed in her place! Even tardiness was looked upon with acute disfavor, for the superintendent moved that the secretary make a note of all teachers who were tardy and that he read their names before the school every three months. The motion was carried! The church itself, with all of the sternness and severity peculiar to many of the older German pastors, inquired minutely into the personal integrity of all those who desired to unite with the church. One applicant was refused membership because of questionable morals, another was granted the privilege only on condition that he engage in another business more acceptable to the council, and within the church itself, council members, ushers, and teachers were chided with a frankness that leaves us slightly aghast, albeit with a sneaking admiration for such forthright honesty.

Soon after its establishment in the new church home, the congregation, for the first time, grew conscious of the need of its young people for a definite responsibility and part in the church program. While their elders had been

enmeshed in the conflict and worry of building the new church, the children had been growing to maturity without the proper training in leadership so essential to the future development of the church itself. With this crying need in mind, the pastor organized the Young People's Alliance, and we look with tenderness upon that first constitution of the organization, written with such childlike earnestness and zeal. The members solemnly promised to attend all of the meetings of the Alliance, to send an excuse for any necessary absence, "to have a special care for those among our young people who do not feel at home in our midst," and "to affectionately look after and reclaim any that seem indifferent to their duties." They held a prayer meeting of their own once each week, provided flowers for the pulpit each Sunday, promoted temperance among their own members, and in general paved the way for greater awareness of the importance of boys and girls in their active relationship to the church.

On the fifteenth of July, 1890, the church, now completed, stood ready for dedication. Pastor Thrall had come to Messiah's at a time when the first fine enthusiasm for building the new church had died away, when the building committee itself had lost its inspiration, and when political and ecclesiastical officials outside the church predicted the failure of the project. Small wonder then that every one of the 260,000 bricks of the church looked like a Paradise regained to a pastor who had inherited the thankless task of completing a church started by the efforts of his predecessor. When we look upon the picture of the church auditorium with its reflector oil lamps and its creaking folding chairs, there is little of the aesthetic to recommend it to the modern eye, but it seemed beautiful indeed to members who had sacrificed time and money to make it possible. And with what pride the Young People's Alliance must have listened to the tolling of the tower bell, the especial gift of the young people to their new church home. The inscription on the bell read: "Sacred to the memory of Minnie M. Gilmore, first President of the Young People's Alliance of Messiah's Lutheran Church. I call to service with a lusty tone that All may come and none stay home." Of this bell, Pastor Thrall spoke simply but tellingly: "As its iron tongue shall speak out from the tower to our members and all other possible attendants, calling them to public devotions about the altars of Messiah's, may the call be regarded and obeyed as coming from a height far above the church tower." The women of the church purchased the carpet for the auditorium, and in one of his terse messages to his people, Pastor Thrall suggested that everyone attending the services contribute a little care in keeping the carpet clean. He dryly announced that some might do well to adopt the ancient Jewish custom of leaving their sandals outside the sanctuary while attending the services! The church had been won by sweat and blood, and no desecration, however small, was to be encouraged. So it was that the people of Messiah's met in a veritable festival of Thanksgiving, in the middle of June, for the dedication of their church. Special liturgical and consecration services marked the day itself and the event was emphasized throughout the week by a series of speeches delivered by neighboring pastors. Truly it became an occasion long to be remembered, and Pastor Thrall, overcome by the

consummation of the great dream, could only say, "Praise God, from whom all blessings flow."

When Pastor Thrall left Messiah's Lutheran Church in the fall of 1891, he left a simple charge to his people which has never been surpassed in graciousness or wisdom—a message that any congregation may well take to its heart whenever a change in pastorates occurs. He said, "The retiring pastor does not always interest himself in aiding his successor, but we find it a pleasure, and a great pleasure to aid in every possible way our good brother Bannen. Though until very lately an entire stranger to me, I cannot but be interested in him and pray his success, because of my interest in and attachment to the interests of the congregation. Let me say to you, the dear people of Messiah's, while we hope to be kindly remembered when gone from your midst, do not let your devotion to us be at the expense of my successor. Brother Bannen now becomes your pastor and be is entitled to your undivided support, hearty co-operation and affection. He should have the first place in your attention and affection so long as he remains your pastor." With this kindly benediction upon his head, Pastor Bannen entered upon his duties as the new pastor of Messiah's Lutheran Church.

Maturity

"Still in thy right hand carry gentle peace."

KING HENRY VIII

*"Hath borne his faculties so meek, hath been
So clear in his great office, that his virtues
Will plead like angels, trumpet-tongued"*

MACBETH

"He lives in fame that died in virtue's cause."

TITUS ANDRONICUS

Maturity

IN THE RECORDS of Messiah's Lutheran Church is still preserved a letter written by the secretary of the church council, dated September 15, 1891, and addressed to Pastor Robert G. Bannen. In it he writes, "I hope that you have not changed your mind, but that you have fully decided to come. I hope that you will come on the twenty-ninth for we will be ready to receive you, and I hope that you will not disappoint me." Little could the secretary of the council foresee that Pastor Bannen was not to disappoint him or the people of Messiah's. This invitation was posted to a young man who not only answered the call, but who was to serve his people as a beloved pastor for forty-seven years, leaving only when death itself had severed the pastoral bond between them.

The older members of our congregation still look back with tenderness and pleasure to that evening more than fifty years ago when the congregation welcomed the new pastor and his bride of seven hours to Messiah's Lutheran Church. A newspaper columnist, in the florid and grandiose style of that period, wrote of Pastor Bannen and that memorable reception: "This good brother believed that it was not good for man to be alone, and especially in a strange land, and so took to himself before starting for his field of labor, one of the fair daughters of Selinsgrove, Miss Nora E. Cooper, to be his helpmate through life. They were married at noon in the presence of many friends, left on the Pennsylvania railroad train in the afternoon, arriving here at seven o'clock. They were met at the Market street station and conveyed to the parsonage where a large portion of the congregation was assembled and a reception given." With what pride did the members of the congregation plan to present the bride and groom with a "beautiful dining room set in oak" and with what exasperation did they look upon several of the youngsters, who, arriving late at the reception and believing the presentation to have been made, spilled the beans by asking the pastor how he liked the new furniture! At that time Pastor Bannen and his bride took no wedding trip, because, they blushingly confessed, they had no money. They planned to save enough money to attend the World's Fair at Chicago at a later date, but when the great day came, Pastor Bannen had to take the delayed wedding trip by himself while Mrs. Bannen stayed at home to care for the baby!

One of the first projects undertaken during the Reverend Bannen's pastorate was the improvement and enlargement of the Sunday School (chapel) at a cost of one thousand dollars. History was repeating itself yet again in this building operation, for increased numbers had made it necessary "to make room" for these newcomers who had chosen Messiah's for their church home. Shortly before this, Pastor Bannen had received an attractive call to a pastorate in California, and was seriously considering an affirmative answer to it, but a desolate council pleaded

with him to remain. The council felt certain that, among other considerations, the plans for renovating the Sunday School rooms would not be consummated without his leadership. Pastor Bannen, touched by their trust and confidence in him, refused the offer, hearing in mind perhaps those earlier occasions when a pastorless church had left the people of Messiah's dispirited and discouraged, and unable to go forward with the same enthusiasm and zeal. In 1896, a year after the enlargement of the Sunday School, a lot was purchased for a parsonage, and in 1899, the parsonage itself came into being. Up until this time, the pastor of Messiah's had lived in rented houses, sometimes several blocks removed from the church, and April first had brought its annual dread of having to move. It had not been either convenient or pleasant for the pastor and his wife to live apart from the core of the church itself, and a parsonage had long seemed advisable. These were the depression years of the close of the nineteenth century, and with work scarce and money sparse, many of the congregation felt that a parsonage was out of the question; but oddly enough, hard times had their advantages in this particular instance, for those who were out of work and could not contribute money, gave their labors to the building of a parsonage whose cost was incredibly small in the light of its sturdy, spacious proportions. The pastor of Messiah's at last had a home that he could call his own, where he might maintain closer and more intimate contacts with the activities of his church.

On the tenth anniversary of Pastor Bannen's ministry to the people of Messiah's Lutheran Church, the congregation gathered for one of the most unusual services ever to be held in the community. Several months before, the debt of the church had been divided into shares of various amounts which were taken over and paid for by members of the congregation, and on this eventful Sunday the people crowded into the church to watch their pastor burn the mortgage for two thousand dollars. Pastor Bannen placed the mortgage in an urn, the flames rose like slender spires in the still air, and as the congregation softly sang, "Praise God From Whom All Blessings Flow," many heads were bowed low in prayer and tears fell silently as the people gratefully acknowledged this long-awaited realization of their labor and of their dreams. At the evening service, Pastor Bannen burned a second mortgage for one thousand dollars, and under the dimmed lights, with only the flames from the burning papers to illuminate the room, the congregation stood with bowed heads and thankful hearts, their shadows casting weird reflections across the muted room. Pastor Steck, who had appropriately returned to Messiah's to deliver the morning sermon for this occasion, must have looked with humble gratification upon the completion of a task and a privilege which he had started many years before during the early struggles of his people. Several hundreds of these people had had no part in those infant difficulties, but they had cheerfully taken up the burden in the eternal spirit of "Carry on!"

Two years later, on the twelfth anniversary of his pastorate, Pastor Bannen sounded the keynote of the spirit of the church which was to prevail in all of the years to come when he rose in the pulpit and addressed these words to his

people: "Ye have been my glory and my joy because ye have been at peace among yourselves. Nothing so handicaps a pastor as to have the members of his church divided into factions, one arrayed against the other, the discord often extending into the council. The relations of our council members have always been most amiable. We have met together and prayed together and there has never been a clash or hitch on any important question. I think this is largely due to our dependence on God." Pastor Bannen himself had in no small measure contributed to the harmony of the church, for on more than one occasion his own soft words had turned the wrath and vexations of his people into shame. Like one or two of his predecessors, he had come to this parish with many doubts and misgivings, fully aware that the church had been divided against itself over problems of building and finances, and not blind to the fact that it is only too easy for a young church to yield to the throes of discouragement during its first faltering steps. He had determined to stay with his people as long as his predecessors had stayed, and now, after twelve years of service to them he could say to them: "I have helped many to find the way of life, and so my love and zeal for your place of worship I can hardly express. As I go forth in the future, I can be strong not only in your love but strong in the promise of Christ."

In the fall of 1903, Pastor Bannen dared to hope for the first time that his dream and prayers for a pipe organ in the church might be realized. He was informed that Mr. Carnegie would be glad to provide the last half of the cost of an organ, at the price of \$1,600, when the first half of the payment had been collected from the congregation. Inspired and encouraged by this offer, the congregation not only approved the purchase of the organ but also the suggestions of the council for certain renovations in the church auditorium, including the removal of the seats and the installation of pews more befitting a sanctuary. Eight hundred organ pipes were put up for "sale" at one dollar each, and the members of the church experienced a very real and personal joy in the privilege of "buying" these pipes for the new organ. Even the little tots stood on tiptoe each Sunday to examine the chart which indicated the increased sales from week to week. On March 6, 1904, dedication services for the new pipe organ and for the reopening of the church were held, and though the congregation looked with gratification upon the sweet toned organ, the new floors, pews, and carpets, and the new steam heating plant, the pastor had still another reason to be proud, not only of his church, but of his congregation as well. The total cost of the improvements had amounted to more than \$5,000, less than half of which had been raised, and at both morning and evening services, Pastor Bannen had called upon his people to pledge themselves for the remaining amount. One believes that his heart must have stood still in humble awe when over three thousand dollars was pledged in three-quarters of an hour at the morning service; and when the pledges continued to pour in at the evening service, Pastor Bannen had an experience unique to most churches—he had to ask his people to stop giving, because more than enough had been secured!

Just twenty years after the dedication of the new church and chapel, Messiah's Lutheran Church took another forward step indicative of its growing

maturity. The church now had a membership of over five hundred, with a like enrollment in the Sunday School, and once more the people of the church experienced the acute necessity for larger quarters. The Sunday School had over-crowded the chapel and under the new program of expansion, an addition was built to the old chapel large enough to accommodate two adult classes with a membership of more than one hundred each. Adjoining the old chapel a new children's chapel was built, designed for the use of the beginners and of the primary department. This little chapel could truly be called "a thing of beauty and a joy forever," with its interior finished in pure colonial style, and with its superbly beautiful stained glass windows. The large cathedral window at the front of the chapel represented the gift of W. D. Crooks, who had been associated with the Sunday School work of Messiah's Lutheran Church for thirty-five years, and who had served as the efficient superintendent of the primary department for twenty-five years. The window itself presents the Christ in one of his most appealing roles—the Good Shepherd. The two windows at the other end of the chapel, "Christ Blessing the Children" and "The Flight into Egypt" were also the gifts of Mr. and Mrs. Crooks as memorials to their mothers, and the others came as gifts of individuals and of classes in the Sunday School.

On the twelfth of June, 1910, in spite of the downpour of rain that equalled the deluge that greeted the laying of the corner stone many years before, the Sunday School assembled in its old crowded quarters and after the opening meditation, marched to its new quarters singing "Onward Christian Soldiers." It was a happy day for the Bible school, and especially for Mr. W. D. Crooks as he led his band of little children to their new church home in the little chapel, so tenderly designed to emphasize our Lord's love for children. At the evening service, Dr. John Barb, president of the Synod, conducted the solemn and beautiful dedication services, consecrating the new Sunday School rooms and the chapel to the services of the Master. It was a crowning achievement in the pastorate of the Reverend Bannen, who had served the congregation of Messiah's for eighteen years. The additions and the new chapel had amounted to almost fourteen thousand dollars, almost eight thousand of which had been raised from funds on hand and from amounts pledged at the dedicatory services. The whole amount could have been raised at this time, but the pastor and the council asked for pledges for one year only, in order that no faithful member should find himself unduly burdened by this new enterprise. Within ten years, the people of Messiah's had thus realized building projects in excess of \$25,000. It was a record of which they could well be proud.

When Pastor Bannen celebrated the twenty-fifth year of his pastorate at Messiah's Lutheran Church, he received a letter from one of his friends which well expresses the devotion with which he had been held by his people for a quarter of a century: "It is not often that one hears of two hearts uniting for life, begin by establishing a home and a life saving station at the same time, but this is what you did twenty-five years ago, and today you have the rich reward of a 'well done,' and the admiration of friends and neighbors who rejoice in your splendid work." Pastor Bannen had come to the church when its membership

had numbered little more than two hundred, and now the congregation boasted a communistic membership of over seven hundred.

Not the least of Pastor Bannen's duties had been his privilege to officiate at over three hundred weddings, a duty that brought him the title of "the marrying parson." Pastor Bannen soon became accustomed to being called upon at almost any hour of the day or night to perform a marriage ceremony. Many of the young people of the community who could call no church their own, but who felt the wistful need of a pastor's blessing upon their union, came to Pastor Bannen, who had become a familiar and well-loved figure in twenty-five years of service to the community. He was fond of telling his varied experiences at these many ceremonies, not the least of which was a marriage performed in double quick time for a double quick reason! A greatly excited young man had rung the door bell and frantically requested that he be married to the young woman whom he had brought with him. "Can you do it quick?" the young man gasped. Pastor Bannen assured him that he could, but asked what was wrong. We can picture his astonishment when he was told that the constable was after the couple and had already started for the South Side. As the license was fully in order, Pastor Bannen hastily read the marriage lines, and as speedily as the couple had come, as quickly did they leave. Pastor Bannen later remarked, "I'll tell you we were a nervous crowd, for I was just as much frightened as the couple. I fully expected to see that constable walk into the room before I finished pronouncing the words that made them man and wife." On still another occasion, Pastor Bannen found himself reading the marriage ceremony, not to the strains of Lohengrin, but to the clatter of roller skates! The children of the neighborhood, suspecting that a wedding was on foot, invaded the porch on their skates and rolled from window to window for "ringside seats," commenting aloud on each aspect of the ceremony!

These were the last carefree days that Pastor Bannen was to know for several years, for the grim horror of the World War now cast its shadow across the country and upon the hearts of the people of Messiah's Lutheran Church. With mingled pride and pain the congregation added one star to another in the service flag of the church, and even as Pastor Bannen administered to the spiritual needs of these young men who were going forth to fight and to die, so was another young pastor to perform the same service for the sons of these men over twenty years later, in another world holocaust. Perhaps Pastor Bannen's ministry and influence during those heart-breaking months can best be told in the letter of a young officers who wrote to him in these words: "I have the little Testament you gave me with the special verses on the fly leaf, and I have read it often. In fact, it is always with me in the left hand pocket of my blouse—and it was not until I came up here (France) that I could appreciate the full meaning of those verses. They mean more to me than anything I have found. If it were not for censorship I could tell you what they meant to me several nights when I read Romans 8 and Rev. 14:13, and in the morning Matt. 5:1-12." Not all of the young men who went forth to serve their country returned to their homes and to their church, but Pastor Bannen followed them with his prayers, even to death itself.



THE REV. R. G. BANNEN, D.D.
1891-1939

A few years later, when the shadow of war had passed into oblivion and the church could give its undivided attention to its domestic problems and its plans for further spiritual enrichment, the congregation took on a new project, the entire support of maintaining a missionary in Liberia, Africa. Although the church had contributed close to thirty thousand dollars in benevolences during the thirty years of Mr. Bannen's pastorate, the support had gone mostly to mission work at large, and the church had had no project in which it could take a definite personal interest. The people felt that they were contributing to a flesh-and-blood actuality when Miss Bertha Koenig, their first missionary, wrote them letters like this from the hush country of interior Africa: "I am trying to get the land under cultivation, getting more and more of the hush cut away, giving less chance for the leopards to lurk around. We have a big cassava farm (this is for both schools). We planted quite a stretch of pineapples last year and will plant about three times as much this year. The girls also have their little gardens. I have morning and evening prayers with the girls, and am in charge of the schools which are attended by both boys and girls, and am at present overseeing the tailor shop. . . . I was glad to leave America knowing that I belong to some one. I mean that a particular church has adopted me as their missionary and I am glad this church is you." Miss Koenig's work at the Kpolopele Girls' School in Liberia aroused so much interest that a few years later the church council was able to finance her salary for the year from the Easter offering. This was the work that was later to be taken up and continued by Kirsten Marie Jensen, our present missionary to Africa.

Late in the year 1921, another organization was born to the church, the W. D. Crooks Missionary Society, a living memorial to the man who had given so much of his unselfish devotion to Messiah's Lutheran Church. Although the Ladies' Auxiliary had long been a devoted part of the church, faithful "Marthas" in the performance of their duties, and although the Women's Missionary Society had assumed certain educational and benevolent projects relating to the work of the church in the foreign field, no society had functioned exclusively to care for mission work at home. Forty women of the church proudly became charter members of this new organization, dedicated to stand for the high principles of missions and benevolences, for loyalty to the church, and for the love of others that characterized the beautiful life of the one whose name it bore. Mrs. Oliver Decker became its first president, and under her efficient leadership the society expanded into various fields of social service during the years to come.

Many of the people of Messiah's Lutheran Church will still remember Pastor Bannen's thirty-first anniversary, when every inch of available space in the church was occupied for the dedication of the Deagan cathedral chimes, given by her children in memory of Mrs. Sarah Hawkins, a life-long member of the church and daughter of Sarah Keiser, one of the founders of the church itself. Twenty-one years before, all of the former pastors of Messiah's except one had returned to celebrate Pastor Bannen's anniversary with him, but now he alone was living to testify to the maturity of his beloved church, his first and only

charge. Perhaps it was a gold letter day tinged with a touch of sadness, yet it must have been a source of spiritual satisfaction to him to recognize the continuity of service which had been carried down from a founder of the church to her grandchildren—grandchildren who lived in distant cities but who had presented this memorial to a church which had known the faithful services of both their mother and their grandmother. Sara Keiser had known a congregation of ten brave souls; her grandchildren now saw a thriving congregation of nearly nine hundred.

But the church had grown not only in membership but in the spirit of voluntary giving. Three years later, the president of the Susquehanna Synod paid Messiah's Lutheran Church as fine and as deserved a tribute as has ever been merited by a church when he pointed out that there were times when the congregation had given more to benevolences during the year than it had expended on itself. The people of Messiah's had been trained to give to others as well as to themselves, to support missionary and educational projects in the church at large; but in most communities local expenses in a church far exceed benevolences, and when there is a reversal of this procedure it may be termed a phenomenal record in any denomination.

When Pastor Bannen reached the fortieth year of his pastoral care of Messiah's Lutheran Church, he could look with pride upon a church free from debt despite its large apportionment. This was no common achievement, for the reason that the church did not use the annual pledge system usual to many congregations. No canvassers approached the individual members of the congregation to solicit monetary promises from them. Their gifts to God were determined between their consciences and themselves, and their responses to their church had not been found wanting. The average yearly contributions for benevolences alone had been more than four thousand dollars, and for ten years the church had been ably supporting its own missionary in Africa. With what pride Pastor Bannen must have looked upon his people at the special anniversary service to commemorate his fortieth year among them; with what gratitude he must have looked upon the church organist, Mr. A. O. Ball, who had celebrated so many of these anniversaries with him in the faithful ministry of music; and with what special love his heart must have gone out to those of his people who had been in the congregation forty years before and who now sat in special pews at the anniversary service to do him honor. They had been good years, and years in which Mrs. Bannen had completely shared, not only as a leader in missionary and Sunday School work in this church to which she had come as a bride, but as a very real force for good in the community at large. The bewildered, newly married young couple who had come to the church two score years ago had won for themselves an enviable position of esteem in an appreciative community and in a church to which they had devoted their services.

In 1935, the church entered upon another project which included basement improvements, new Sunday School rooms and a modern kitchen, at an approximate cost of ten thousand dollars. It was the last building project undertaken by the

people of Messiah's during Pastor Bannen's ministry, for shortly thereafter, the beloved pastor of the church experienced a gradual disintegration of health and physical reserve, and in the spring of 1939, the congregation lost the pastor who had served it for over forty-seven years. With pride the people of Messiah's could look back upon this pastor who had received his honorary degree of Doctor of Divinity from Susquehanna University; who had served as president of the old Susquehanna Synod and as president of the Lutheran ministers of the county; who had been a member of the Board of Trustees of the Tressler Orphans' Home at Loysville and a member of the Board of Directors of Susquehanna University; and who for five years had served as president of the largest Christian Endeavor Union in the world. But gratified as the church had been by Pastor Bannen's educational and cultural achievements, perhaps they remembered him best for the simple acts of kindness which were an inherent part of his daily living. Occasionally we hear these gentle testimonies—"Dr. Bannen came to visit me every day during my long illness."—"He was such a comfort to us when we lost our mother."—"He was patient with us even when we sinned." Oliver Goldsmith might well have been writing of Pastor Bannen when he penned these famous words:

*"At church with meek and unaffected grace,
His looks adorned the venerable place;
Truth from his lips prevailed with double sway,
And fools who came to scoff, remained to pray.
The service past, around the pious man,
With steady zeal, each honest rustic ran:
Even children followed with endearing wile,
And plucked his gown to spare the good man's smile.
His ready smile a parent's warmth expressed;
Their welfare pleased him and their cares distract;
To them his heart, his love, his griefs were given,
But all his serious thoughts had rest in heaven.
As some tall cliff that lifts its awful form
Swells from the vale and midway leaves the storm,
Thro' round its breast the rolling clouds are spread,
Eternal sunshine settles on its head."*

THE DESERTED VILLAGE.

Years of Grace

"He bath a daily beauty in his life."

OTHELLO

"*And, see, a book of prayer in his hand!
True ornaments to know a holy man.*"

KING RICHARD III

"*Can such things be,
And overcome us like a summer's cloud,
Without our special wonder?*"

MACBETH

"*So long as men can breathe, or eyes can see,
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.*"

SONNET

Pears of Grace

IN WHAT strange ways the skeins of chance and circumstance are woven into the design and pattern of our lives. Pastor Shaheen has ever borne this thought in mind when he remembers the fortuitous chain of events that brought him by a devious path to the pastorate of Messiah's Lutheran Church. During the closing years of Pastor Bannen's life, when an exhausted physical reserve no longer permitted him to cope single-handed with the responsibilities of an actively growing church, he had been assisted in certain routine duties of the church life by the Reverend Ralph W. Baker. The first thread was cast upon the loom when Mr. Baker asked Pastor Shaheen, then a student at Susquehanna University, to participate in one of the Sunday services of Messiah's Lutheran Church. The first time that Mr. Shaheen ever talked at length with Pastor Bannen still remains a treasured memory in the heart of our present pastor. As he looked at the gentle face of the man who had guided the destiny and fortune of a church for almost half a century, the young college lad was deeply moved and stirred, and in a prescient moment, too strange and too vague even to be called by name, he felt that some day he would have the privilege of working with this mentor among pastors. A warm friendship matured between the elderly pastor whose life span was drawing to a gracious close and the young man who was looking forward with eager eyes and heart to the beginning of his.

During his first year at the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg, Pastor Shaheen came to Messiah's Lutheran Church as a student assistant, combining his theological training with the very real and earthy work of church administration, and finding much in the wise counsel of his trusted friend, Pastor Bannen, to take to his heart. For over two years the young assistant traveled between the cloistered halls of the Seminary and the sturdy walls of Messiah's, helping Pastor Bannen with the countless pastoral calls, preparing the evening service when Pastor Bannen's health could no longer stand the stress of it, and wholeheartedly giving to him whatever of devotion and service his needs might require. Upon Pastor Bannen's death in the spring of 1939, Mr. Shaheen became Acting Pastor of the church, and on December 10, 1939, he was unanimously elected its Pastor at a traditional congregational meeting, the pastorate to become effective upon his graduation from the Seminary and his ordination by the Central Pennsylvania Synod of the United Lutheran Church. One Bible school teacher recalls with delight the interest with which that congregational meeting was regarded even by the children. A group of solemn-eyed little boys, unaware that they were much too young to share in the privilege of selecting the new pastor, came to her with stubby pencils in their chubby hands to ask her aid in helping them to spell "Shaheen." "You see," one of them explained most care-

fully, "we want to vote for Raymond, but if he's going to be our pastor, we guess we can't call him 'Raymond' any more, only we don't know how to spell 'Mr. Shaheen'!"

It isn't often that three soul-stirring privileges come to one man in the small space of a month, but Pastor Shaheen had this significant experience. On the tenth of May, 1940, he received the degree of Bachelor of Divinity from the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg; on the twenty-second of that month he was ordained by the Synod; and three days later he was married to Miss Winifred Heim in this church which had been entrusted into his keeping. Less than two months later, on the seventh of July, 1940, the congregation again gathered, for the first time in almost half a century, for the traditional installation service for a new pastor. It was a day of "beauty and with wonder lit" in more ways than one for the Reverend Shaheen when he took his vows before these people whom he had come to know and to love, and whose lives were now given into his spiritual keeping. It was an equally proud and gratifying moment for another pastor, the Reverend O. E. Sunday, who delivered the charge to the new pastor, whom he had confirmed in the faith of the Lutheran church and whom he had guided and led through boyhood to maturity. Perhaps he was remembering that small intense lad with a new degree of tenderness as he looked at him now, bringing to his church and to his people in this solemn moment the sensitivity of a devout spirit, the alertness of a keen mind, and the sincerity of a great and abiding purpose.

Early in his ministry, Pastor Shaheen, ever mindful that no spiritual institution has a greater responsibility for the moral welfare and training of its children than does the church, introduced the Daily Vacation Bible School to the activities of the teeming church life. For the first time, because of their attendance at a Bible school during the lovely summer mornings of the week days, the children of the church were made psychologically aware that the life of Christ bore a definite relationship to their own. No longer was their blessed Lord Jesus just another man who lived in the vague long-ago and who might well slip from memory in the busy and exciting intervals between each Sunday. Christ now sat with them at their small tables on Monday morning as well as on Sunday, while their awkward little hands worked miracles of beauty in clay. Jesus really listened to their tiny petitions as childish voices shyly formulated their loving little prayers—"Bless Mother, bless Daddy, bless my puppy dog." The patient Shepherd of the compassionate eyes, who nineteen hundred years ago had invited other children to the loving shelter of his arms, now followed these children to the park for their recreation period. Small children who could not yet comprehend the majesty of a God upon His throne, could understand and love a little Lord Jesus who wandered to the far hills to play with the little wood animals. There was nothing strange nor frightening to them about a little Lord without a crown who, like themselves, once played in a narrow street before a humble dooryard. He had become one with them on these warm, sunlit days when they listened to the stories of His eternal kindness and courage, when they modelled the village

in which He must have lived, and when they sang the songs that He loved to hear. In addition to instruction in Bible study, the children were prepared in still another way to meet their spiritual responsibilities in the church. One day each week found them sharing in a model church service, learning the rich meaning of our church symbols and traditions, and vying with one another for the privilege of contributing their fledgling talents to this special hour. During Pastor Shaheen's ministry, on an average of one hundred children have been receiving instruction of this calibre every morning for two weeks of the summer months, and our gratitude has gone out in full measure to those faithful and competent teachers who have given freely of their time and of their devotion "even to the least of these."

In the fall of 1940, one of the finest innovations that Messiah's Lutheran Church has ever known had its birth in the advent of a full-time ministry of music. Up until this time, the musical programs of the church had been more or less incidental to the worship services and to the educational functions of the parish, and had been confined to those who had a recognized talent for this fine art. Now, for the first time, music was to become a definite medium for Christian education, limited not to a paid quartet or to a church choir of selected voices, but open to every member of the church who had hungered for self-expression through song. Children sing as naturally as they skip or jump, alive to rhythm in its most primitive form; but through the formative years ahead they frequently lose this joyous spontaneity either through self-consciousness, ridicule, or lack of training. Years later we find them standing in their pews, hymnals resting idly in their hands, unresponsive to the surge and roll of the great hymns of the church. They "don't sing," and perhaps no one but themselves can know the frustration that comes to a heart that can answer the appealing call to worship with silence alone. Recognizing this soul-need of a people to praise God in song, even as Miriam did of old in a hymn of thanksgiving to Jehovah, Pastor Shaheen opened wide this half-closed door to young and old alike by securing the service of a full-time minister of music. What a far cry from that day of long-ago when the organist requested a dollar each week to play for the Sunday services "with prayer meeting thrown in," and a financially harassed council "waited upon her" to persuade her to do it for fifty cents!

Messiah's Lutheran Church has been fortunate indeed, during Pastor Shaheen's ministry, to have secured the services of two ministers of music, both of them graduates of the Westminster Choir College and ably trained to take over the musical life and development of a church that has stood ready to receive it. Messiah's has always been generous in its response to the musical needs of its people. One has only to look at the record of one year alone during Pastor Bannen's ministry to recognize this co-operative expenditure on the part of the church council. In that year alone almost one thousand dollars were allotted for the musical programs of the congregation. Small wonder then that a ministry of music was looked upon as a natural and necessary step in the great cycle of a fast developing musical consciousness. Under the new and "stepped-up" program

of musical progress, close to one hundred and twenty-five members of the congregation are taking an active part in one of the four church choirs, and during this time untold dignity and beauty have been added to the musical services by the complete vestment of all of the choirs. This program was started by the first minister of music of Messiah's, Louise Atno Jacobs, and is now being expanded by the present minister of music, Marion E. Davis.

Unhappily, it is all too human for a church to measure its progress in terms of numbers only. We look at our choirs and murmur proudly, "One hundred and twenty-five!" but though significant in itself, it doesn't tell the whole story by any means. The present minister of music at Messiah's has brought to the church a ministry which does not limit itself to the mere mechanics of music; and one has only to step "behind the scenes" to sense the flavor and tang, the meaningful place that music now holds in the hearts of people to whom it once meant nothing more than one note strung onto another. We pause at the door of the sacristy to watch two High School girls listening with rapt attention to a Bach prelude, two youngsters whose musical appreciation had never been developed beyond the "swing and sway" of the latest dance band. We tactfully withdraw as a little girl, encouraged by the warmth and intimacy of her lesson hour, confides a personal problem to the minister of music, a problem amusingly trivial to her adults, but very real and important to her. We watch the expression of joyous astonishment that flashes over the face of a timid young woman who finds that she has just been encouraged to sing aloud, by herself, for the first time in her life. We listen to the eager voices of a group of adolescents as they cluster around their minister of music with the cry, "May we really sing for the Thanksgiving service? Really and truly?" These are intangibles that can not be measured by an ordinary yard stick, yet they are indicative of a new-born awareness of "music as a wondrous link with God, taking sometimes the place of prayer."

The present program of the ministry of music includes weekly rehearsals for the four choirs—the Church Choir, the Boys' Choir, the Girls' Choir, and the Children's Choir—rehearsals which are not designed for the development of voice technique alone, but which are planned to inspire in the choir members a realization of what their ministry in song can mean to the devotional spirit of the church. As a part of the tireless service of the church, the minister of music gives on an average of thirty-five private lessons each week to the members of the choirs, lessons which have pointed the way to a clearer understanding and appreciation of good church music and its relation to the worship services, lessons which have developed a new poise and confidence among the choirs, lessons which have attached a new value to the worth of human personality in terms of individual abilities. At the present time, children under the age of eight receive no specific training in church music, but future plans of the minister of music include a "cherub choir" made up of children from three to eight years of age, together with informal song fests among the young mothers of these children. This choir for the tiniest tots of the church does not participate in any of the worship services of the church, but it paves the way for membership in the Junior choir,



THE REV. E. RAYMOND SHAHEEN
1940.

and we look forward with the keenest anticipation to that time when this final link shall be forged in the compact chain of musical training and appreciation which is being offered to every member of the congregation, regardless of age or inherent talent.

A second objective of the ministry of music will be a greater emphasis upon the song service in the Sunday School, with a comprehensive program planned to adapt the great hymns and music of the church to each particular age group. For the first time, even the children of the church are beginning to sense the difference between the meaningless jingles that sometimes pass for church music, and the glorious hymns of the church which remain eternal because of their rich musical appeal and their spiritual significance. Truly the ministry of music has contributed a far-telling enrichment to the life of the church, and we look forward to an even greater promise of things to come.

In the fall of 1940, Pastor Shaheen contributed another ministry to the service of Messiah's Lutheran Church—the ministry of the printed word. Even as Pastor Thrall, over fifty years before, had recognized the need for a church publication exclusively its own, so did Pastor Shaheen realize the untold service that a weekly church messenger can bring to the busy lives of an active congregation. So it was that the pastor's brain child, "Messiah's Messenger," had its birth, and a most attractive brain child it proved to be with its compact arrangement of the Sunday services, its schedule of weekly activities, its warm and pungent comments upon the progress and plans of the church, and like a pot of gold at the end of the rainbow, its final page of precious gems from the world's finest religious literature. Messiah's Messenger, in a very real sense of the word, has kept its hand upon the pulse of the church and given to the people of Messiah's a weekly record in black and white of their achievements and their shortcomings. It has been provocative in more ways than one, an invitation and a challenge to greater service and deeper faith. One member of the congregation, a self-confessed "Christmas and Easter" attendant, found herself reading every word of the weekly bulletin with the same wistfulness with which a small boy presses his nose against a toy window to look at a shining bauble—an outsider looking in. It was a lonely, uncomfortable feeling, and finally, intrigued by the title of a forthcoming sermon, she determinedly set forth to church the following Sunday to find forgiveness for her indifference at the altar of her God and to be swept up into a renewed fellowship with her Lord. What an effective commentary upon the Messenger, conceived from Pastor Shaheen's abiding concern for his people, and quietly winging its way into homes that may be touched by the church in no other way.

Encouraged by the splendid work of the Daily Vacation Bible school and its impress upon the minds and hearts of the children of the church during those brief summer weeks, Pastor Shaheen organized a week-day Bible school in the fall of 1940. The project received such favorable attention and approval from the public school system of South Williamsport that all children wishing to enroll in the Bible school were released early from school one day each week to attend

classes at the church. Although no school credit has been attached to the project, it has received the fullest co-operation of local educators, and approximately eighty-five children have been attending the sessions of the school each year. The school period opens with a worship service in the chapel of the church, and sturdy little legs that had been wont to run unheedingly and thoughtlessly through the precincts of the church are now learning to walk softly in this little sanctuary. Round, questing eyes that had once looked unseeingly at the altar, the Cross, the candles and the flowers, now look with new appreciation upon these visible symbols of their little Lord Jesus' love. To these children are brought attitudes of worship and reverence, a meaningful explanation of the rich liturgy of the Lutheran church, and the impressive history of its traditions. Following the worship period, the children receive instruction in the life of Christ, studies of the Old Testament, and stories of missionary heroes, with each lesson adapted to the mental and spiritual age of the child. The project has been the only one of its kind in this section of the state and speaks well for a church and for a pastor that stand ready to preserve a heritage of the spirit for their children.

In the spring of 1941, Pastor Shaheen, with the same earnest and prayerful consideration that he has always given to the needs of his people, brought back into its own a portion of the traditional liturgy of the Lutheran church. Ritual and liturgy were not completely foreign to some of the older members of the congregation who clearly remembered their childhood days when the liturgy had been an accepted part of the service and had given a grace and a dignity to the worship that nothing had surpassed. The choirs were now fully vested, the altar had taken on a new significance with the addition of a gleaming Cross of gold, and it seemed but a right and holy tribute to God Himself that the ritual of the Lutheran church, which has always had the altar as its one and only focal point, should be restored to its rightful place in the hearts of a reverent people. The Book of Worship for the Lutheran church found its way into the quiet sanctuary, and hands that once fumbled awkwardly for the opening ritual now turn confidently and surely to that magnificent invocation: "In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, Amen." Voices that once strayed through the phrases of petition and confession as one who gropes through a strange land, have now found these solemn words pregnant with strength, with humility, and with benediction, and are receiving sustenance for the week to come in these wonderful prayers that are the common heritage of Lutherans everywhere. On many occasions, the "guests within our gates" have immediately felt an "at homeness" as they join in the familiar and well-loved pleas to their God, and have sung the benedictions which have long been a part of their own church worship. As a last step in this reverent tribute to our God, the pastor himself has now donned as a gift from Mrs. R. G. Bannen's Bible Class and the Men's Bible Class the full ecclesiastical vestment, and as the processional moves down the aisle to the sacred altar, one instinctively feels, "This is our pastor, the shepherd of his flock. This is our sanctuary, dedicated to God and worthy of His love."

In the summer of 1941, Pastor Shaheen again met the needs of a problem that had been waxing acute for several years. With the rapidly growing member-

ship in the church, there were many occasions when the main sanctuary could no longer accommodate the numbers of people who attended the services. The overflow had to be seated in the Sunday School room, and despite the amplifying system, the arrangement could scarcely be called satisfying. These people were too far removed from the altar and the service in general to truly feel themselves a part of the worship program, so Pastor Shaheen introduced two morning services to the activity of the church, that all might worship comfortably within the main sanctuary. The early morning service immediately found favor with many of the congregation, who liked the quiet and the peace that attends the hush of early morning worship, and this year, the service is being used throughout the winter, as well as the summer. Messiah's Lutheran Church has been unique perhaps in offering to its varied congregation three types of worship service designed to fit the temperament and taste of each individual. The early morning service in the chapel, replete with the rich traditions of the Lutheran church, has supplied the need of those to whom the sacred ritual and liturgy have been dignified and beautiful attributes to the worship of their God. The evening service, quietly meditative, has been designed for those who prefer a simpler mode of worship; and the regular morning service takes a middle ground between these two. How grateful may we be to a church and to a pastor who have given us a choice of services fitted to our personal needs, "that all may come and none may stay at home."

In July, 1941, Pastor Shaheen launched one of the largest and finest programs to which the people of Messiah's were ever asked to lend their concerted efforts, "The Rev. Robert G. Bannen, D.D., Memorial Program." In a brochure fittingly entitled "To the Glory of God, and in loving Memory of a Shepherd of Souls," Pastor Shaheen presented the program to his people in these words: "The Reverend Robert G. Bannen, D.D., had the unusual distinction of serving the Messiah's Lutheran Church for over forty-seven and a half years. This record, unique among Protestant, Catholic and Jewish circles in Lycoming County and with rare parallel in the church at large, is not the sole reason why a people should wish to honor him. Rather, it is the life and the spirit of the man which alone have given lasting significance to the record of years which was his. The qualities of a consecrated soul, an earnest preacher, and a devoted pastor combined to make him a most lovable character among men. It is a very natural thing that a people led by such a spirit for almost a half century should want to honor him. It is equally natural that whatever tribute they should place in his memory should be a thing of distinction not only for the passing year, but for decades to come. It is a noble thought that nothing we should do in the years to come should overshadow the memorial we raise to him."

To this end, Pastor Shaheen presented a plan which calls for a beautiful altar specifically consecrated to the memory of Dr. Bannen; a new and finer arrangement of the chancel of the church to meet the needs of the present day; new stained glass windows of beauty in keeping with the proposed chancel; and a modern pipe organ. The pastor reminded his people that a goodly number of years had passed since any sizeable amount of money had been devoted to the sanctuary of the church, and, in his words, "it is the place where tired, anxious,

and disquieted souls come to find peace and pardon. We should always want it to have beauty and dignity, so that the soul is the easier lifted heavenward." At a congregational meeting, the proposed memorial received the approval of the people of Messiah's Lutheran Church, many of whom had been baptized, confirmed, and married by Pastor Bannen. The altar of the church had long been closely associated in their hearts with these holy rites, and it seemed the highest tribute that could be offered to their former pastor to consecrate an altar of unparalleled beauty and distinction to his memory. It has ever been at the altar of the church that a pastor experiences his most sacred responsibility as the mediator between God and man, and Pastor Bannen had unerringly led his people to God in all of the holy rites which center about the altar of the sanctuary. In that light, nothing could hallow and bless his memory more appropriately than a dignified altar of everlasting beauty.

The congregation of Messiah's had likewise become increasingly aware that the chancel of the church, in its present size and proportion, no longer met the needs of a church service in which greater numbers of people were participating. A choir loft designed to accommodate a double quartet or a small choir of voices, has ill-adapted itself for those occasions when a choir of one hundred voices has stood ready to lend its services to the worship hour. A new arrangement of the chancel will provide ample room for the combined choirs and add a dignity to the musical portion of the service which has been impossible with part of the choir seated in the loft, part on the dais, and the rest grouped in the pews of the auditorium itself. Under this plan, the structure of the church will not be materially altered in any way, and new windows can be placed in the church without the expense of rebuilding any of the walls. The people of Messiah's who have long loved the Crooks memorial window in the chapel and have recognized in its quiet and exquisite harmony a communion with God "that the world can not give nor yet take away," look forward to a sanctuary in which the atmosphere of worship will be enriched by the artistry of beautiful fenestration.

Last of all, the memorial program calls for a new pipe organ. Like the faithful old horse who serves its master through a useful lifetime, the organ of the church has given devoted service to the congregation, but like all things mechanical, it has, after over thirty-seven years of constant use, passed beyond the state of repair. As one member of the congregation has cryptically remarked, "It wheezes." Although large sums of money have been expended from time to time in attempts to restore the organ to its original perfection, it has not only been impossible but not advisable. The musical program has long since outgrown an organ which supplied the necessary background and tone for a choir whose numbers could be counted on one hand, but which was never meant to sustain the surge and volume of one hundred voices. As a leading church of the community, it has not been good to realize that our organ has suffered by comparison with the new and modern organs of other distinguished churches throughout the city, and as a congregation, we eagerly anticipate the purchase of a lovely instrument worthy of the worship services of a gracious and dignified church.

In the late summer of 1941, a committee of men and women conducted a campaign of one week to secure subscriptions and pledges to the program which calls for an expenditure of \$15,000. Although primarily a financial campaign, it yielded a rich harvest in heart-warming experiences to the fifty visitors of the church who were privileged to visit every home in this great project of sharing. One remembers with pride the young factory worker who, peering over his mother's shoulder to note her pledge, remarked, "Aw, Mom! Come on! Let's make it more! Where could we find a better place for our money?" One recalls the eagerness with which a young widow, scarcely able to make the traditional ends meet, smilingly opened the door to her visitor and greeted her with "I'm so glad you've come! I have my money ready for you." One remembers with tenderness the little old lady who sacrificed a daily pleasure in order to contribute her money to the Memorial fund. One smilingly remembers the contribution of one young man who couldn't wait another hour to share in this magnificent project—David Raymond Shaheen, one hour old! This is the stuff of which our church has ever been made, human qualities of sacrifice and devotion which can not be measured in dollars and cents; and the proud spirit of a church looks forward to that day when the War shall no longer be a grim reality, and the plans for the Memorial will be consummated. In the meantime, scarcely a week passes without an additional contribution to the fund which is reaching admirable proportions, and which stands ready for use when essential building materials may once more be used for altars of peace instead of battleships of war.

During Pastor Shaheen's ministry, he has been called upon to give a service that his imagination had never contemplated, a service compounded of grief, pride, and grave responsibility. Over one hundred men and women of the parish have answered the call to the colors, with more leaving each month to defend their God and their country at home and abroad. These young men and women are ever in the thoughts and prayers of our congregation, and not a month passes that a tireless and unselfish committee of women does not remember each of these young people with a gift box. Each week Pastor Shaheen sends a letter to each of these young defenders, so that each may know "that nothing can sever the bond of love" which binds them to their church and to their God. It has been a holy privilege which he has been called upon to perform during these dark days, but these young people carry with them the remembrance of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper administered to them and to their families before they go forth to serve their country; they are sustained by the letters and gifts of an ever-mindful church; and untold hearts of mothers and fathers are comforted each Sabbath when the pastor's prayer goes forth to lift sons and daughters of the parish to the everlasting arms of God Himself.

In the past year or so, the Sunday School of Messiah's Lutheran Church has taken on a more compact and unified form which speaks well for better organization and greater efficiency in the conduct of the school. Small, scattered classes of related ages have been combined into one or more strongly organized groups, and increasing attention has been given by Pastor Shaheen and the Sunday School

board to the Bible school needs of boys and girls of Junior and Senior High school age. Previous to this time, when the children had graduated from the Junior department, the twelve-year-olds were placed in a class by themselves, and the thirteen-year-olds immediately entered the adult division of the Sunday School. Under this system, the children had no opportunity to participate in or plan worship services peculiarly fitted to their needs, and it soon became evident that programs suited to mature men and women had little significance for adolescent boys and girls. Under the revised plan of organization which recognizes the developing social consciousness of boys and girls between the ages of twelve and fourteen and their need for group training, these young "pillars of the church" now have their own Intermediate department, a group apart from the adult division of the Bible school, with a worship service and a lesson period designed for their needs alone. They receive training in attitudes of worship and in group projects which bear a close relationship to their mental and social age. Young men and women of High school age have a similar and isolated department of their own, with specific training in church leadership, and under a program of this calibre, they are prepared to take real responsibility upon their shoulders when they finally enter the adult classes of the Bible study.

In September, 1941, Messiah's Lutheran Church added another church worker to its staff, a student assistant pastor, Howard N. Bream. An Easter service that alone had witnessed the affiliation of 111 new members with Messiah's Lutheran Church gave warning that the pastor could no longer give full and undivided attention to the needs of so large a congregation without assistance, and alive to the significance of a church nightly lighted for some stimulating activity for its people, Pastor Shaheen gave promise to the congregation of even greater and richer service by procuring a student assistant. The assistant pastor has taken over certain pastoral calls, is conducting a series of Bible studies for the mid-week prayer service, and is in charge of the Young People's program for the church. Pastor Shaheen had long felt the acute need for a unified program of worship and activity for the teen-age boys and girls of the church, and a year or so before, some impetus to the movement had been given by the organization of three divisions of a Luther League, classified according to age. In the fall of 1942, the Luther Leagues experienced a "rebirth" and although they are still in their infancy, a comprehensive program has been planned for them, with stress laid upon the practical application of the Christian principles which they are learning in the Bible school. Alert to the need and advisability of centering the activities of young people within the gates of the church, the program includes wholesome programs of recreation and social projects in the community. In addition to this program of activity for the teen-age group, Pastor Shaheen has introduced a Sunday morning church service devoted exclusively to the spiritual development of children between the ages of six and twelve. Modern churches have long recognized the need to foster habits of worship even in the very young, and no program is better adapted to that purpose than a church service which recognizes the immaturity of its children and provides them with training and instruction within the limits of their comprehension. In a service conducted by the assistant pastor, the children have their

we are carried away nineteen hundred years ago, to a day when wise men sought the King, in robes as warmly hued as the oriental sun under which they traveled. Light and shadow have been combined in a lovely tone picture in this little chapel where every accoutrement lends its perfection to the harmony of the whole.

Only one thing was missing—an organ, and again, the story behind the purchase of the little electric organ adds a tender touch to the completion of this loveliest of sanctuaries. By a happy combination of circumstances, an opportunity presented itself for the immediate purchase of an organ at a price somewhat less than the standard, but as no official action had been taken toward the purchase of a chapel organ, no financial plan had been formulated. The pastor still insists that the little organ said "Take me with you!" too plainly and urgently to be resisted, so following the precedent of that other pastor of long ago who bought the church lot to be held in trust for his people, Pastor Shaheen, the student assistant, and the minister of music pooled their resources on the spot and made the initial payment of twenty-five dollars. Where the other six hundred was to come from, they didn't know! But Pastor Shaheen had implicit faith in a people who had always cherished a deep concern for their musical programs, and his faith in them was fully and beautifully justified. When the congregation learned that the organ was yet to be paid for, the entire amount was underwritten by a dozen or more individuals in less than a day. The sweet, full tones of the organ had already found a special place in the hearts of the people, many of whom occasionally paused at the door of the chapel to ask that a favorite hymn be played.

On the eleventh of October, 1942, the Little Chapel of the Good Shepherd was dedicated "to the glory of God and in loving memory of Isabella Diener Hurr by her son John H. Hurr," in a service that has been without parallel in beauty, dignity and an atmosphere of worship. From the first soft organ notes of "He Shall Feed His Flock" to the well-loved recessional "Savior, Like a Shepherd Lead Us," the congregation was acutely aware of the presence of the Good Shepherd within these tranquil walls dedicated to "tiny feet, tired hearts and thirsting souls." The congregation will long remember the eager faces of the children as they passed in solemn procession down the aisle of this sanctuary dedicated to their own small hearts; they will long remember the gravity and the tempered joy of the sermon "This Is Holy Ground"; they will not forget the prayer of benediction, phrased in these inspiring words: "Almighty God, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort ever nigh unto all them that call upon Thee in truth; Sanctify and bless this House, we beseech Thee, with Thine especial presence, according to Thy promise made through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, that they who gather here in Thy Name may be enlightened, comforted, and strengthened by Thy manifold gifts of grace, and made meet for the inheritance of Thy saints in light."

To countless numbers of people this lovely sanctuary has already become a blessed retreat for quiet meditation and prayer. As one member of the congregation expressed it, "When I sit in the hushed reverence of the chapel, I feel that if I were to look quickly over my shoulder, I should see the Good Shepherd Himself.

He's so very close." Day by day precious memories have been tucked away in the hearts of people who have found their way to the chapel because they could not resist the divine invitation of that open door. We think of the young soldiers home on furlough who have come to their pastor to confide their doubts, their fears and their griefs to him in the privacy of the chapel. We think of the young soldiers who have left for the front with the memory of the Lord's Supper still wet upon their lips, young lads who have tiptoed from the chapel beneath the compassionate and understanding eyes of the Good Shepherd. We think of the couple who had weathered seven summers and winters of married life together, but who wanted to renew their sacred vows within the quiet beauty of these walls, and to receive the blessing of their own pastor upon them in the soft glow of the candlelight. We think of the toil-worn woman, a stranger to the church, who found her hesitant way to the chapel with a grief-laden heart, but who left it with new courage to face the fear that only a mother can know—a young son, overseas, unheard from for almost six months. We think of the man who left the chapel with tear-dimmed eyes and the embarrassed but telling explanation, "I don't know why I feel this way. I just do." We think of the faithful little group which gathers once a month at the close of the evening service for a half-hour of music and poetry in the candle-lighted chapel, hungry for these fleeting moments of rest and beauty in a world that is "too much with us." This is the Christlike spirit of a chapel whose radiant grace has breathed its benediction upon a people whose hearts have felt the need for sustenance, comfort, and strength.

In the past three years, 273 new members have become affiliated with the church, bringing the total confirmed membership to 1350. In the course of seventy-five years, Messiah's Lutheran Church has grown from a homeless little band of ten men and women to breath-taking proportions like these, ever reaching upward and striving onward toward more shining goals beyond. Brave in the face of their defeats and disappointments, accepting their victories with a spirit of grateful humility, the people of Messiah's, led by intrepid and well-loved pastors, have grown in grace and understanding and have sustained a church which stands second to none in the city and in the area. As we look forward to the seventy-fifth anniversary of Messiah's Lutheran Church, we pray that she will ever be worthy of her fine and beautiful heritage, and that God will grant us, as a congregation, the full measure of His blessing to go forward, always, in His Name and for His Purposes.



"The Little Chapel of The Good Shepherd"
(Dedicated Oct. 11, 1942)